

## **II. Introduction**

This report summarizes the final results of the State Highway 39 (SH-39)/US Highway 26 (US-26) Corridor planning process and presents recommendations regarding the future development of the corridors.

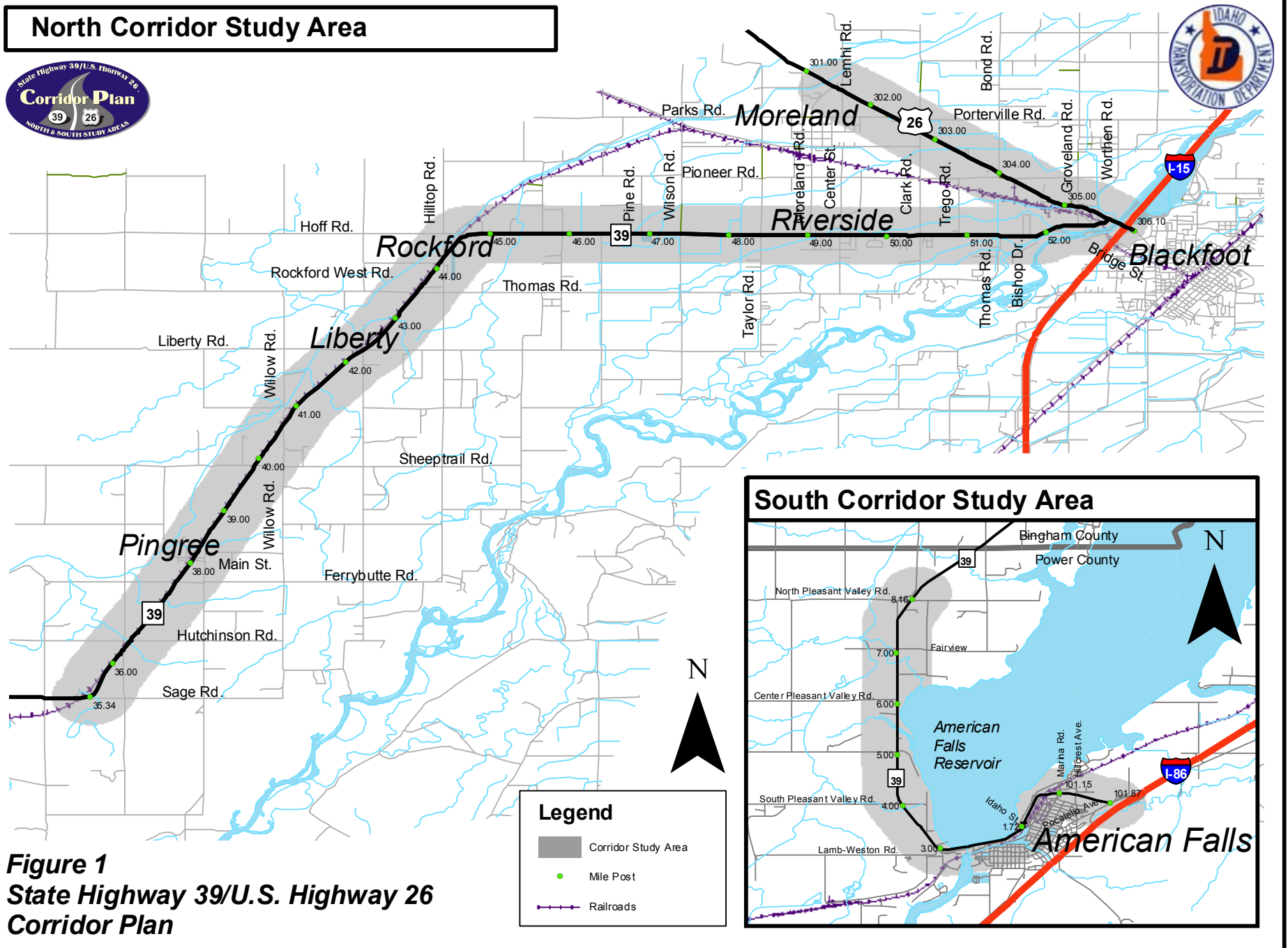
### **Study Area**

As shown in Figure 1, the study area is split into two halves. The north corridor area comprises the 4.5-mile segment of US Highway 26 between Moreland Rd. and the I-15 northbound ramps in the City of Blackfoot and a 17.6-mile segment of SH-39 between Sage Rd. and US-26. The south corridor area consists of an 8.1-mile segment of SH-39 that starts at the intersection of SH-39 (I-86B)/Pocatello Ave. in American Falls and continues to N. Pleasant Valley Rd. Both corridors areas extend roughly one-half mile on either side of the highway.

US-26 provides connections between Blackfoot and Atomic City and Arco to the west, as well as the major intersecting roads of I-15, SH-39, and US Highway 20 near Atomic City. Between Blackfoot and American Falls, SH-39 serves the rural communities of Riverside, Pingree, Springfield, and Aberdeen, connecting with I-86 in American Falls and US-26 to the west of Blackfoot. Due to the rural character of the study area, there is no transit service. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are limited, with a multi-use path in the vicinity of the SH-39/Bridge St. intersection near Blackfoot and another in American Falls near the intersection of SH-39/Ft. Hall Ave./Marina Rd. Sidewalks are located in American Falls adjacent to SH-39 between Idaho St. and Lamb-Weston Rd. Other modes within or nearby the study area include several Union Pacific rail lines, two municipal airports, several high voltage transmission and telecommunications lines, and the navigable waterway of American Falls Reservoir.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the SH-39 and US-26 transportation corridors is to provide transportation facilities for a broad range of current and future travel demands. Examples of these demands include serving the needs of travelers who use the corridors for both regional and long-distance through-travel; serving the needs of residents and communities along and near the corridor that rely on the corridor for commuting, conducting community service activities, and carrying out the other routine activities of daily life and work; and serving the significant amount of traffic generated by the local agricultural industry (truck, farm equipment, and other vehicles).



**Figure 1**  
**State Highway 39/U.S. Highway 26**  
**Corridor Plan**

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It is intended that the corridors should accommodate many modes of travel; both motorized and non-motorized, and that these transportation facilities and services should be provided in as efficient, economical, safe, equitable, and environmentally-conserving a manner as can reasonably be achieved through adherence to accepted standards, requirements of the law and cooperation with elected officials, the public, and other agencies.

The purpose of the corridor plan is to determine existing and future needs, identify and analyze alternate management practices and project improvements, and to adopt recommended management strategies and improvements for all transportation modes in order to address the identified existing and future transportation needs that are forecasted to develop in the next 20-year time period.

## **Statement of Need**

The need for the corridor plan is based on the expected growth within the study area, and the requirement to plan for its orderly accommodation in all modes of transportation. The highest annual average daily traffic (AADT) volumes occur near Blackfoot, with between 8,000 and 10,000 vehicles per day (vpd) along SH-39 and over 16,000 vpd along US-26. For the remainder of the north corridor area and in the south corridor area, volumes are generally in the range of 2,000 – 6,000 vpd. Because of the large component of agricultural traffic carried on SH-39 during the peak harvest season in September and October, there is significant seasonal variation in average daily traffic volumes at certain locations, particularly to the south of Rockford and in the south corridor area, where harvest season volumes are 40 – 50% higher than those in the winter months of January and February.

Future traffic growth rates along US-26 were estimated to be as high as 50% over the next 20 years, with volumes remaining the highest near Blackfoot (15,000 – 17,500 vpd). Along SH-39 in the north corridor area, growth rates over the next 20 years will generally range between 30% - 50%. To the south of Rockford, future AADTs remain below 5,000 vpd, while between Rockford and Blackfoot, future volumes range from roughly 5,500 vpd to nearly 11,500 vpd. Traffic growth rates along SH-39 within the south corridor area are relatively low, with less than 6,000 vpd for all segments except Idaho St. – Lamb-Weston Rd.

## **Public Involvement Program**

An important part of the corridor planning process is the involvement of residents, businesses and local and state governments to help define the transportation needs of the corridor and identify appropriate solutions to meet those needs. To involve these groups, a public involvement program was established to:

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- Listen to the community about transportation issues along the corridors; and
- Solicit input on potential solutions and priorities to address those issues.

The public involvement program was designed to provide a framework to create a collaborative environment that encouraged input and participation by local stakeholders. The goal was to ensure the corridor plan addresses all of the issues and had broad community understanding and support.

Some of the key issues identified through the public involvement program were:

- Need for widening of the two-lane section of US-26 to the west of Bond Rd.;
- Need for widening of SH-39 between Wilson Rd./Riverside and US-26;
- Difficult to access US-26 and SH-39 at some intersections because of the lack of gaps in the traffic stream;
- Need for turn lanes at a number of intersections;
- Conflicts between trucks and farm equipment and general traffic;
- Conflicts between school buses and general traffic;
- Blowing, drifting snow across the highway creates difficult driving conditions at some locations;
- Speed limits are too high in some areas;
- Stop signs are difficult to see at several intersections;
- Drivers make rolling stops through intersections;
- Poor sight distance at some intersections; and
- Skewed intersection angles.

The program was integrated into the corridor planning process and designed to solicit input at key steps.

Corridor Planning Process	Public Involvement Program
Issue Identification	Stakeholder Interviews Public Open House #1 Task Force and TAC meeting
Existing Conditions	Bingham County and Power County Joint Transportation Coalition Meeting
Existing and Future Conditions Corridor Purpose and Goals Preliminary Strategy and Improvement Options	Newsletter #1 Public Open House #2 Bingham County Transportation Coalition Meeting
Recommended Strategy and Options	Newsletter #2 Public Open House #3

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Corridor Planning Process	Public Involvement Program
	Bingham County and Power County Joint Transportation Coalition Meeting
Draft Corridor Plan	Bingham County Transportation Coalition and Power County Transportation Coalition review

### Advisory Groups

#### *Technical Advisory Committee and Task Force*

Initially, two advisory groups were established to review and comment on the work products at key decision points. A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) consisted of county and city planning and public works staff, federal and state resource agency staff, FHWA representatives, and ITD staff. A Task Force was formed of locally elected and appointed officials and other community organizations. A joint kick-off meeting was held on May 20, 2004.

#### *County Transportation Coalitions*

Bingham and Power Counties have transportation coalitions that meet on a quarterly basis. These coalitions bring together elected officials and staff for local governments and agencies within each county. After the initial kick-off meeting with the TAC and Task Force, it was decided to use the coalitions as the advisory group instead because there was a large amount of overlap between the members of each group. Also, it was believed that attendance would be higher at the regularly scheduled coalition meetings, rather than inviting participants to separate, additional meetings.

The existing conditions analysis and preliminary improvement options were presented to a joint meeting of the Bingham and Power County Transportation Coalitions on January 20, 2005. Participants identified additional locations with possible LOS, safety, traffic operations, and/or geometric deficiencies, as well as potential improvements for further analysis.

The future conditions analysis and draft recommended improvement options were presented to the Bingham County Transportation Coalition on May 23, 2006. Members of the coalition asked questions about specific details of some of the improvements and provided input on the benefits and possible refinements of the improvements.

A draft Corridor Plan report will be distributed to the members of both coalitions for review and comment. Changes to the report based on the comments will be coordinated with the ITD Management Team.

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### **Stakeholder Interviews**

As part of the issue identification phase of the SH-39/US-26 Corridor Plan, a series of fifteen (15) stakeholder interviews were conducted in-person and by telephone in March, 2004. The purpose of the interviews was to gain local insight and experience with the current conditions and problems along the corridors.

### **Public Meetings**

The core opportunity for public participation in the corridor planning process was three public meetings. The meetings were held in an open house format to present and discuss issues and the major findings of the corridor planning effort. The open house format included individual topic displays, with ITD and the consultant team staff on hand to answer questions. The displays were supported by informational handouts and feedback questionnaires.

Given the long length of the corridor areas, the first two open houses were held at two locations – Riverside and American Falls. The third open house was held in Aberdeen, which is located between the north and south corridor areas.

Advance public notice was provided using available and appropriate formats and methods such as media press releases, newspaper ads, newsletters, direct mail notices, community postings, and postings on the project website. Opportunities to provide public comment at the public meetings included both verbal and written comment formats.

The following public meetings were held:

#### **Open house #1 (May 19 and 20, 2004)**

- Announce the start of the study;
- Explain the study process and schedule;
- Provide information about opportunities and format for public input; and
- Identify corridor issues.

#### **Open house #2 (January 18 and 19, 2005)**

- Review existing and future conditions;
- Review land use and socio-economic profile;
- Review environmental scan; and
- Review preliminary improvement options.

#### **Open house #3 (May 23, 2006)**

- Review recommended improvement options.

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### **Project Newsletters**

A project logo was developed to create a unique and consistent identity for the project.

Newsletters were the primary vehicle for summarizing the technical information and announcing upcoming public meetings. The newsletters were distributed through a combination of direct mail and drop-off points, such as government offices, community centers, libraries, and schools. The distribution was timed to allow at least a two-week notice for an upcoming public meeting.

### **Media Releases**

Media releases were used to announce upcoming public meetings. Each media release was distributed by the ITD Public Affairs Office. Also, public meeting announcements were included on community calendars.

In addition to the media releases, newspaper display ads were placed in local newspapers to run for the two weeks prior to the public meeting.

### **Project Website**

A website was used to post project updates, meeting announcements and summaries, technical reports, maps, and newsletters for downloading. Electronic files of all work products and reports were produced for posting on the website.

### **Mailing List**

A mailing list was maintained for the duration of the project. The list consisted of 81 local stakeholders, organizations, and individuals that participated in the public meetings. After each meeting, the list was updated and used for the next meeting notice and newsletter distribution.

Notice of the second round of open houses was sent via bulk mailing to all rural postal routes along the corridor.

## **Study Organization**

The study was organized according to the following major tasks:

- I. Identification of Existing Transportation, Land Use, and Environmental Conditions
- II. Identification of Future Transportation and Land Use Conditions
- III. Establishment of Corridor Goals and Objectives
- IV. Development of Management Strategies and Improvement Options
- V. Identification of Recommended Management Strategies and Improvements
- VI. Preparation of Corridor Plan Document

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Task I. involved the preparation of inventories of existing transportation, land use, and environmental characteristics within the study area. The transportation inventory data was used to analyze existing transportation deficiencies for the various modes. Existing (reported) transportation deficiencies were also identified through a series of stakeholder interviews, an ITD Management Team meeting, a joint Technical Advisory Committee and Task Force meeting, and two public open house meetings.

Also as a part of Task I., a review of local transportation and land use plans that may affect the corridor was conducted. This included the *Bingham County Master Transportation Plan*,<sup>1</sup> *City of Blackfoot Transportation Plan*,<sup>2</sup> and the *Power County Transportation Plan*.<sup>3</sup> The City of American Falls does not have a formal transportation plan, but city staff were contacted to discuss future transportation projects within the city. The comprehensive plans for Bingham County, the City of Blackfoot, Power County, and the City of American Falls were also reviewed. The findings of these reviews are discussed within the Land Use section of this report.

In Task II., future transportation and land use conditions were identified for the year 2025. Traffic forecasts were developed using a trendline forecasting method. A land use-based traffic forecast was also performed for the north corridor area to verify the results of the trendline analysis, using future year land use estimates. For the north corridor area, the travel forecasts were used to estimate future transportation deficiencies by applying the same analysis procedures followed in Task I. for existing conditions. For the south corridor area, it was decided that a future deficiencies analysis would not be necessary based on the relatively low anticipated growth in development, low to moderate future traffic volumes, and the likelihood that the additional future traffic in this area will not result in significantly increased transportation system needs, beyond what was identified for existing conditions.

The information on existing and future conditions developed in Tasks I. and II. was used in Task III. to establish corridor goals and objectives. A set of screening criteria related to the goals and objectives was also developed in Task III. for evaluating management strategy and improvement options.

In Task IV., management strategy and improvement options were developed to address the transportation deficiencies identified in Tasks I. and II. These included improvements to existing roadways as well as alternative mode improvements.

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<sup>1</sup> Bingham County, Bingham County Master Transportation Plan, (2001).

<sup>2</sup> City of Blackfoot, City of Blackfoot Transportation Plan, (1999).

<sup>3</sup> Power County Highway District, Power County Transportation Plan, (2003).

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The improvement options were evaluated in Task V., resulting in a set of draft recommended improvements that were reviewed by the ITD Management Team, Bingham County Transportation Coalition, Power County Transportation Coalition, and public. The draft recommended improvements were revised based on the review comments to produce the final recommended improvements.

Part I. of this report is divided into an existing transportation conditions section and a future transportation conditions section. Both of these sections are organized by mode (roadways, bicycle and pedestrian, and other modes). For each mode, a description of modal facilities and demand is provided first, followed by a discussion of identified deficiencies. Roadway deficiencies are broken down by the categories of capacity and LOS, traffic operations, safety, and geometrics.

Part II. of the report is divided into a land use section and environmental section. Within the land use section, information is first presented on existing land use conditions by corridor segment. This is followed by a discussion of estimated future land use conditions based on forecasts of housing units and employment. The environmental section contains a socioeconomic profile of the local population and an environmental scan characterizing existing environmental resources within the corridor.

Part III. of the report describes the recommended corridor improvements and the process used to define them. The improvements are presented by the following corridor segments:

- US-26 from Moreland Rd. to the I-15 northbound ramps;
- I-86B (SH-39) from Pocatello Ave. to Idaho St. (American Falls);
- SH-39 from Idaho St. to N. Pleasant Valley Rd.; and
- SH-39 from Sage Rd. to US-26 in Blackfoot.

Finally, it should be noted that the transportation facility deficiencies identified in this report do not necessarily pose safety hazards, nor does the identification of these deficiencies imply that the improvements required to address them will necessarily be constructed. Implementation of the improvements identified in this study is dependent on the availability of funding. Preparation of this study by the Idaho Transportation Department does not guarantee adequate financial resources to implement these improvements.